

## WHAT IS THE ACCEPTED NAME FOR THIS PLANT?

-OR-

## DO I HAVE TO CALL IT *SARRACENIA ROSEA*?

BARRY RICE • P.O. Box 72741 • Davis, CA 95617 • USA •  
barry@carnivorousplants.org

Keywords: botany.

As a coeditor for Carnivorous Plant Newsletter, one of my jobs is to make sure that the articles in the journal are in accordance with correct botanical practice—in particular, Jan and I make sure authors always use validly published botanical names. While this might seem sensible, I get a constant stream of complaints about our strict practice in this regard. There is also a great deal of confusion about how Latin names should be used. Maybe this article will help our readers understand a little more about Latin names, and maybe I will get fewer complaints from angry, albeit creative authors!

First, let me describe the difference between a “good” Latin name and a “bad” Latin name. It is not correct to write an article about a plant and just casually refer to it using a Latin name that you made up. If we allowed this, chaos would rule as everyone would have their own set of pet rules and names, and we would never know what all the names referred to. Fortunately, there is a book of rules that governs how plants are named, and this is called the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN). The ICBN clearly outlines everything that authors must do in order to publish a new botanical Latin name validly. Look at any new plant description in Carnivorous Plant Newsletter or other reputable journals, and you will see a number of features not found in the regular articles (such as Latin descriptions, designations of “type” specimens, etc.). If an author trying to publish a new Latin plant name writes an article which does not contain all of these features, the name is instantly considered illegitimate. When a Latin name is not clothed with all the trappings of a correct botanical description, it is called a “naked name”, or *nomen nudum*.

An example of a *nomen nudum* familiar to many carnivorous plant growers is “*Drosera coccicaulis*.” You will often see this plant mentioned in seed catalogues and articles. This plant was apparently introduced into cultivation more than a decade ago, and whoever did so called the plant “*Drosera coccicaulis*.” Unfortunately, to this day we do not know where this plant came from, or exactly what it really is. (Gibson (2002) provides a good review of this plant, and concludes it may be related to *Drosera natalensis* or *Drosera venusta*.) I really wish the person who introduced this plant had followed botanical rules when he or she introduced it, and did not dub it with a *nomen nudum* to confuse us all! (By the way, “*Drosera coccicaulis*” translates to “berry-stem”! Does anyone want to guess what that means?)

A special kind of illegitimate name involves “ranks.” For example, consider the North American species *Drosera filiformis*. Typically, this species is subdivided into two varieties, the northern *Drosera filiformis* var. *filiformis* and the southern *Drosera filiformis* var. *tracyi*. Meanwhile, some authors consider the two plants to be sufficiently different to be properly treated as two separate species. However, as Schnell (2002, p.273) notes, no one ever bothered to write a paper that elevated the southern plant from varietal rank to a species rank. So if you read an article about “*Drosera tracyi*”, you should be aware that the article is using an illegitimate name.

(In this particular case it is not likely that you will confuse the name for anything other than the southern variety of *Drosera filiformis*, but if the rank name being incorrectly elevated were something more common like “*alba*” or “*major*”, you can see the opportunity for confusion.) So whether or not you believe that the southern plant should be treated as a separate species or subspecies, you can only call it *Drosera filiformis* var. *tracyi* until someone writes an paper—following ICBN form—which publishes the new name validly.

It is particularly confusing when multiple names for the same plants exist. There are two different kinds of cases for this.

Suppose a botanist validly published a fine Latin species name for a plant. For example, “*Sarracenia minor*” was described by a botanist named Walter in 1788 (the describing author’s name becomes part of the plant’s full name, in this case *Sarracenia minor* Walter). Subsequently, in 1804 a botanist named Smith gave this very same plant a name, also at the species rank: *Sarracenia adunca* Smith. This second name is just a repeat “synonym” of *Sarracenia minor* Walter, and the ICBN rules state that in the case of synonyms, the first name published validly is the name you must use. (Notice that both these names are at the same rank—in this case they are both species names—which is one of the reasons they are considered synonyms.)

In a different kind of situation, the ICBN does allow multiple names—at different ranks—for the same sets of plants; this is acceptable because scientific opinions may vary on how the plants should be classified. Indeed, scientists do not always unanimously agree on when plants should be considered species, subspecies, varieties, etc., and the resulting arguments can turn into multi-decadal feuds of unmatched vitriol.

Here are some examples.

*Sarracenia rubra* is a plant which has been classified as consisting of five separate subspecies, i.e. *S. rubra* subsp. *rubra*, *Sarracenia rubra* subsp. *alabamensis*, *S. rubra* subsp. *wherryi*, *S. rubra* subsp. *jonesii*, and *S. rubra* subsp. *gulfensis*. However, some botanists prefer to group the second and third plants in that list into subspecies of a different species. They would prefer to use the names *Sarracenia alabamensis* subsp. *alabamensis* and *S. alabamensis* subsp. *wherryi* (which they could, because these names were validly published in accordance with the ICBN rules). Additionally, some botanists consider *S. rubra* subsp. *jonesii* to be a separate species: *Sarracenia jonesii*. Incorporating all these alternative names, the list of plants at the beginning of this paragraph could be rewritten as *Sarracenia rubra* subsp. *rubra*, *S. alabamensis* subsp. *alabamensis*, *S. alabamensis* subsp. *wherryi*, *S. jonesii*, and *S. rubra* subsp. *gulfensis*. You should use whichever sets of names that reflect your own beliefs on the nature of these plants.

A recent paper by Naczi *et al.* (1999) validly published the name *Sarracenia rosea* for a plant already bearing the name *Sarracenia purpurea* subsp. *venosa* var. *burkii*. You are free to use whichever of these two names you think is more appropriate. If you feel that this plant is a member of the species *Sarracenia purpurea*, then you could call it *Sarracenia purpurea* subsp. *venosa* var. *burkii*. If you feel it is different enough to warrant being called a separate species, you could call it *Sarracenia rosea*. I have been contacted by a number of people who think it should be considered a separate subspecies—however, the names “*Sarracenia purpurea* subsp. *burkii*” or “*Sarracenia purpurea* subsp. *rosea*” have not been published in accordance with the ICBN, so using either would be only creating another illegitimate name, and more confusion.

Similar examples of these matters: Some botanists divide *Drosera brevifolia* into *Drosera leucantha* and *Drosera annua*; some botanists divide *Utricularia dichotoma* into *Utricularia dichotoma*, *Utricularia monanthos*, and *Utricularia novae-zelandiae*. It is up to you to decide which names to use. Just stay away from the *nomen nudum* forbidden list! If you are ever confused about

the status of a carnivorous plant name, look at Jan Schläuer's definitive on-line database ([http://www.omnisterra.com/bot/cp\\_home.cgi](http://www.omnisterra.com/bot/cp_home.cgi)). If this web address ever changes in the future, I am sure you will be able to find it through links at the ICPS home page.

I hope I have not bored you with a review of these guidelines. Perhaps in the future you will be more certain about which names you must use, which names you must not use, and which names you can use at your own discretion. Carnivorous Plant Newsletter will continue to use names that are both in accordance with its submitting authors' wishes, but also always in compliance with the ICBN. If our journal were not in compliance with the ICBN, many of our writers would not feel comfortable contributing articles describing new species to our journal, and readers would have to consider our publication a little (or a lot!) less reliable.

#### References

- Gibson, R. 2002, *Drosera 'coccicaulis'*. Bulletin of the Australian Carnivorous Plant Society. 21(2):1-5.
- Greuter, W., Barrie, F.R., Burdet, H.M., Chaloner, W.G., Demoulin, V., Hawksworth, D.L., Jørgensen, P.M., Nicolson, D.H., Silva, P.C., Treharne, P., and McNeill, J. (eds.) 1994, International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (Tokyo Code), Adopted by the Fifteenth International Botanical Congress, Yokohama, August-September 1993, Regnum Vegetabile 131. Koeltz Scientific Books, Königstein.
- Naczi, R.F.C., Soper, E.M., Case, F.W., and Case, R.B. 1999, *Sarracenia rosea* (Sarraceniaceae), a new species of pitcher plant from the southeastern United States. Sida, 18(4): 1183-1206.
- Schnell, D. E. 2002, Carnivorous Plants of the United States and Canada, 2nd Edition. Timber Press, Portland.



**Propagators & Dealers of the highest quality carnivorous plants.**

Sarracenia

Pinguicula

Nepenthes

Drosera

Dionaea

**[www.petflytrap.com](http://www.petflytrap.com)**

For ordering and product availability, please check our website or call toll free 1-888-437-1668  
- Wholesale & Retail - Year Round Availability - Student Discounts - No Order Minimums - USA Only -

**Contract tissue culture propagation available. Call for details.**